

Heat finally coming back on for Summerset Village residents in Fresno

By Troy Pope
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Repairs to gas lines at Summerset Village Apartments neared completion Saturday, and most services – heat, hot water and stoves – were expected to be restored by Saturday night, Fresno city officials said.

Pacific Gas & Electric Co. spent the day completing inspections and relighting pilot lights. Work crews were out in force Saturday replacing heaters, stoves and water heaters.

“Today, PG&E came out and had 20 inspectors on site, and they’ve been systematically going through all of these apartments and signing off,” said Mark Standriff, Fresno’s director of communications. “As soon as PG&E signs off, they’ll red tag appliances and these guys will come in and replace it.”

City officials learned in mid-November that gas service had been cut off to the central Fresno apartment complex, leaving hundreds of residents without heat and hot water.

The repairs were completed in 10 days – more than a week ahead of schedule, Standriff said.

“It’s like a little Christmas miracle to be able to turn things around this quickly,” he said.

Stoves and water heaters were to be back on by Saturday night, and crews expected about 90 percent of heaters to be back on as well. It would be 100 percent, but Standriff said the contractor already had bought out all the stock of heaters in Fresno.

Brad Hardie, president of Regency Property Management in Fresno, was hired by the owner of the complex to take charge of the work.

“Brad showed up with \$3,500 worth of space heaters and was here that first Friday night on site – he’s been a hero since Day One,” Standriff said. “He basically called everybody in town and said it’s all hands on deck.”

Hardie said PG&E was on site to light pilot lights and identify any that were bad for his team to replace.

“It’s very important to get their heat so they can start cooking and provide for themselves,” Hardie said. “It makes us feel really good to be able to get them back their heat and their gas in a short timeline.”

Additional renovations still need to be done to bring the complex back up to code, Hardie said. Many units will need new paint, flooring, base boards and fixtures, which could take another 60 to 90 days to complete.

Steven Mounavieng, who is from Thailand and has lived at Summerset since 2009, has been without heat since Nov. 16.

Mounavieng, who retired as a chef in 2005, used his craft to help his neighbors.

“I volunteered to make food and cook for the people every day. Every day is a 10-hour day.”

Mounavieng said that many of the residents are children and older people who cannot withstand the cold. He said an elderly man was taken to the hospital Friday night because of the cold.

But Mounavieng, like many others, now have heat and the ability to cook again in their homes.

“We’re very happy for PG&E and the community and their support,” Mounavieng said. “Thank you for all your help.”

He said he is happy that things will soon be “back to normal.”

Anong Souda came to the United States from Laos in 1981 and has lived in Summerset since 2013.

“I paid my rent every month, but nothing worked,” Souda said.

Crews recently replaced his heater and fixed several lighting fixtures in his home, but he is still waiting for some other improvements.

“It’s garbage. It’s no good,” Souda said, referring to the tattered carpeting, deteriorating shelving and rotting rafters supporting the roof over his front door.

Souda said he is expecting work crews to come back Monday to replace his carpet and begin to fix the other things in his home that are falling apart.

But regardless, Souda was excited about all the things that have been fixed or replaced and for what’s still to come.

There’s never a good time for a crisis like this to happen, but the combination of cold weather and unsafe living conditions made the situation totally unacceptable. Fortunately, Fresno responded as only a great city can.

Mayor Ashley Swearengin

Mayor Ashley Swearengin thanked the residents for their resiliency and also the many volunteers who stepped forward to assist them with hot meals and warm blankets, including FIRM, the American Red Cross, Southern Baptist Convention and Fresno County Health Department, and the city employees, PG&E, Nelson Construction, Commercial Design Builders and their subcontractors for their diligence in recent weeks to make needed repairs.

“The heroes of this story have to include Brad Hardie and his team at Regency Property Management for their unfailing commitment to changing the timeline for repairs from ‘eventually’ to ‘immediately,’ ” the mayor said. “They filled the leadership void left by the property owner, and we wouldn’t be able to make this announcement today without their involvement.”

Deficiencies in the central Fresno apartment complex were found after PG&E shut off gas to the complex because lines were dangerously faulty and in need of repairs.

The city eventually declared a state of emergency so it could step in to take over repairs if the owner failed to do so.

Owner Chris Henry said he had been unaware of the extent of problems.

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